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SIPDIS

DEPARTMENT FOR EAP, EAP/MTS, EAP/MLS, EAP/RSP
NSC FOR D.WALTON

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [ECON](#) [ASEAN](#) [ID](#)
SUBJECT: ASEAN -- SECGEN SURIN ON HUMAN RIGHTS MECHANISM,
BURMA

Classified By: Pol/C Joseph L. Novak, reasons 1.4(b+d).

¶1. (C) SUMMARY: In an August 25 diplomatic briefing at ASEAN headquarters in Jakarta, Secretary General Surin outlined developments in the areas of establishing an ASEAN human rights mechanism and addressing regional stability issues, such as North Korea. Surin reiterated ASEAN's call for the immediate release of Aung San Suu Kyi and other political prisoners in Burma. Surin hailed U.S. accession to the ASEAN Treaty of Amity and Cooperation. He also voiced support for an ASEAN-U.S. Summit that would be held later this year, perhaps on the margins of the APEC meeting in November in Singapore. END SUMMARY.

ASEAN BRIEFING

¶2. (SBU) ASEAN Secretary General Surin Pitsuwan briefed ASEAN member permanent representatives and diplomats from ASEAN dialogue partners during an August 25 meeting at the Secretariat in Jakarta. He described key outcomes from the recent ASEAN Ministerial Meeting (AMM), ASEAN Regional Forum, and ASEAN Economic Ministers' Meeting (AEM). He also briefly discussed progress in establishing the Jakarta-based Committee of Permanent Representatives (CPR) during the first of what he said would be a regular series of Secretariat briefings. Surin explained that the CPR had begun regular meetings in Jakarta and would gradually take on a greater role directing ASEAN's activities.

HUMAN RIGHTS BODY

¶3. (C) Human rights was the first issue on the agenda. SecGen Surin reiterated the organization's commitment to establishing a viable ASEAN Inter-governmental Commission on Human Rights (AICHR). He conceded that the AMM's decision on Terms of Reference for the AICHR was a difficult one given differences among member states over how robust the mechanism should be. While most ASEAN members supported general language on the "promotion" of human rights, several balked at stronger language calling for the "protection" of human rights. The resulting compromise dropped the stronger language. However, Surin said he hoped that a strong political declaration on the matter would be issued at the ASEAN Summit in October 2009 in Thailand. He acknowledged that ASEAN's credibility depended on a viable human rights mechanism.

BURMA

¶4. (C) Burma remains a key priority for ASEAN. Surin reiterated the AMM's call for the Burmese government to

release Aung San Suu Kyi and other political prisoners immediately and to hold free and fair elections. ASEAN would continue to support the efforts of Special Envoy Ibrahim Gambari and other UN efforts. The SecGen also explained that ASEAN was continuing to make progress coordinating humanitarian assistance to parts of Burma devastated by Cyclone Nargis in April 2008. He called on international donors to provide additional assistance for cyclone reconstruction and noted that ASEAN and the UN planned to organize a follow-on international donor's conference to address the situation. (Note: Septel reviews ASEAN's efforts encouraging Indonesia to play a more assertive role on Burma.)

ASIAN REGIONAL STABILITY

15. (C) Turning to security issues, SecGen Surin said the ARF remained the leading forum for discussing potential threats to stability in Asia. Chief among these threats is North Korea's nuclear program. Surin suggested that the ARF could support efforts to end North Korea's nuclear program because it is the only regional mechanism that includes all participants in the Six Party Talks. ASEAN would welcome holding sessions of the Six Party Talks on the margins of ARF meetings and was open to other suggestions of how the organization could support denuclearization efforts.

16. (U) SecGen Surin also outlined a broad range of ASEAN initiatives in energy and climate change. ASEAN will organize a meeting of the East Asia Summit environment ministers in Singapore in October to explore establishing a

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common position in advance of the Copenhagen Conference. (Note: The East Asia Summit includes the ten ASEAN members plus Australia, China, India, Japan, New Zealand and South Korea.) ASEAN had also launched a range of discussions with China, Japan and South Korea to explore energy security, renewable energy, conservation and related matters.

17. (U) Recent economic-related ASEAN meetings had yielded significant progress, according to Surin. He related that the ASEAN Trade in Goods Agreement would enter force during the October Summit and would lower tariff barriers across the region. However, Surin cautioned that ASEAN members must guard against a corresponding rise in non-tariff barriers and that the organization must explore ways to prevent these from emerging. He also said that addressing inter-ASEAN trade in services would be the organization's next economic priority.

PRAISE FOR U.S. ENGAGEMENT

18. (SBU) Surin hailed the United States' recent accession to the ASEAN Treaty of Amity and Cooperation (TAC) as an historic milestone in U.S.-ASEAN relations. Noting the Secretary's comments on the matter, Surin said that ASEAN hoped the United States would have a resident ASEAN representative in Jakarta as soon as possible. He also said that ASEAN members hoped to hold a U.S.-ASEAN summit in the near future and suggested doing so on the margins of the November APEC meeting in Singapore.

HUME